

EQBAL AHMED

BETWEEN PAST AND

FUTURE

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Eqbal Ahmed a populist sociologist came to prominence in the late 1960s due to his support for the Indian invasion of East Pakistan. He was then projected as a progressive intellectual by the American establishment and stationed in Pakistan since 1991. Along with Pervez Hoodbhoy and Zia Mian, Eqbal Ahmed led the imperialist campaign against Pakistan's nuclear program during the last year of his life. The Clinton administration sponsored this campaign.

This book brings together some of Eqbal Ahmed's newspaper articles against Pakistan's nuclear program and against Islam. It is introduced by a laudatory preface of Hoodbhoy and edited by Zia Mian and two Pakistani Americans. These papers provide useful insights for understanding the imperialist strategy vis-à-vis the Muslim world in general and Pakistan in particular

Imperialism's fundamental commitment is to democracy American imperialism slaughtered fifteen million Red Indians to establish a constitutional republic in North America. It is slaughtering millions of Iraqis, Afghans and Palestinians to establish democratic regimes. Its murderous assaults in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Colombia, Nicaragua and Bolivia had the same aim. Bush is telling us that American attacks will ensure the imposition of democratic regimes in Iran, Syria, North Korea and Cuba in the near future

Eqbal Ahmed is an advocate of democracy. His justification of democracy is premised on quasi-Marxist ideology. Thus according to Eqbal Ahmed "Legitimacy (of a ruling elite) is assured to the extent that the political processes promoted by the system of power are responsive to the forces created by the system of production" (P8) It is "the transformation of land and labor into commodities"(P10) which calls for the movements for social change. According to Eqbal Ahmed "traditional societies have disappeared from the Third World"(P11). People are both angry and hopeful that rational planning and action can lead to improvement. Belief in reason has replaced belief in religion. The new ideas are "democracy, development, distribution and integration".(P13)

Eqbal Ahmed condemns Pakistan for not living up to democratic ideals and accepts imperialist slanders against Pakistan at face value. He repeats this propaganda incessantly without bothering with facts. Rape in the Islamic Republic is endemic”(P236).”Pakistan society is steeped in corruption and hypocrisy. (P237).”Violence against women in Pakistan is widespread”(P236)”The Sharia based laws are laws against justice –they perpetuate inequality and injustice in our society” (P237) No evidence, factual or even anecdotal, is produced to substantiate these slanders

An intellectual assault is also advocated against our national ideology. The discipline of “Pakistan Studies is a distorted and a sectarian version of history”(P 254). It contains “ a sectarian hate mongering syllabus in schools and discourages historical research” (P 254). The curriculum of Islamiyat, a compulsory subject in our schools and colleges is arid bigoted and devoid of spirituality” (P 255). This curriculum reduces Islam to a penal code, a ritual of abulition and prayers” (Eqbal Ahmed is reputed never to have prayed not even on his death bed according to Pervez Hoodbhoy who was an eyewitness to Eqbal Ahmed’s death (P XX III-XXIV). It “produces a history of sectarian gangs” (P 257). Therefore both Pakistan Studies and Islamiyat should be drastically restructured to make them vehicles for the dissemination of secular imperialist sponsored values a project now being implemented by World Bank consultants in our federal and provincial ministries of education. The “congruence of class interests between the Ulema and the aristocrats” (P261) must be exposed. Eqbal Ahmed reminds us that orientalist such as Rodinson, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Bernard Lewis and MR Gibb have done this admirably and should be taken as our guides (P262). Pakistan must whole-heartedly embrace liberalism and secularism and abandon traditional Islam. Islam must be thoroughly secularized and “we should acknowledge that Christians, Jews and Hindus (are) an integral part of the Islamic enterprise”(PP267). As against this restorationist (i.e. traditional) Islam is contrary to the political, cultural and historical traditions of Muslims “(P274). Islamic resurgence is a myth ‘the resurgence of Islam is a product of uneven modernization and the failure of governments to satisfy basic needs”(P279). Social democratic reorganization of the state and the flourishing of capitalist civil society is all that is required to put an end to this anti American hate, anongering Islamic resurgence

Modernity is described as “ the development of society from one mode of production to another” (P 281-282) Islamic resurgence is a product of, yet resistant to, this transition. According to Eqbal Ahmed the triumph of modernity is pre destined and capitalism is the end of history. This quasi- Marxist does not any where in this book consider the possibility or the desirability of a transition from capitalism. Religious teaching must be “adopted to the requirements of modern life”(P283) for the triumph of modernity is inevitable and highly desirable . Eqbal Ahmed’s great hero is Mustafa Kamal Pasha (P284) and according to Eqbal Ahmed (P 289). Prof Fazl-ul Rehman of the University of Chicago is idolized as the leading Islamic intellectual who advocated the secularisation of Islam (P 289-290)

According to Eqbal Ahmed Islamic revivalists “are inherently undemocratic in theory and practice. They reject democratic values, acceptance of pluralism, emphasis on

reason as the organizing principle of social and political life, commitment to the reduction of difference by dialogues and secular legislation” (P294)

The imperialists and Eqbal Ahmed as one of spokesmen proclaim that these democratic ideas are universal, that these liberal values (not socialist ones) are self-evident. For example Eqbal Ahmed writes,

“Equality does not imply equivalence in wealth, education or material power. What it does imply is equality in the right to life, social mobility and citizenship” (P301) Ignoring liberal values leads to “barbarism”(P304). Eqbal Ahmed endorses Sindh’s right to secede as he did that of East Pakistan in 1971, as a liberal right (P305). He recognizes the American constitution as the source of all liberal rights. According to Eqbal Ahmed “ the American constitution is the beacon of struggle for all generations” (P306) The declaration of the Ahmedis as non Muslims according to Eqbal Ahmed “Shredded to pieces the sound principles of (liberal) equality” (P 306). This “ perception of the Ahmedis illustrates “the ultra vulnerability of our state to evil (P308)

Eqbal calls “ the liberal, legal community to become active” (P 311) in the defense of American values “Modernist liberal Muslims who are concerned over the rise of revivalist. Movements”(P311) are also urged to join the struggle. Eqbal Ahmed seeks to mobilize Pakistani intellectuals for the defense of liberal American values

Eqbal Ahmed was an American propagandist in Pakistan during the 1990s. He abandoned whatever commitment he had to Marxism like many Latin American and French Marxists after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He was recruited by the American establishment to serve their interest in Pakistan. The pro American lobby in Pakistan tried to project a progressive intellectual image but as this show Eqbal Ahmed was fully committed to the imperialist liberal cause. He has little grasp of theory and his analysis is shallow and polemical. He makes sweeping generalization and does not present any carefully sifted evidence to substantiate his claims. He was a propagandist not an academic and for work what is important is the skillful distortion of facts and adroit use of rhetoric. Like Hamza Alavi and Feroze Ahmed, Eqbal Ahmed served imperialism well in Pakistan